

school board's director of education and other supervisory officers, to implement the policies and practices laid down.

At the present time, there are 194 school boards in Ontario.

What can I contribute? How can I participate?

We have established that in order to do its work well, a school board must remain sensitive and responsive to the needs and interests of the communities it serves. And how does it go about this? Through dialogue, through contact, through communication. And here is where *you* come in: a dialogue involves two people, an *exchange* of thoughts and points of view. If your school board is to reflect *your* views and interests, it is essential that you speak up and communicate your educational concerns to your school board members and school board officials. 'Effective communication' has become such an abused slogan of the media-obsessed seventies that we often lose sight of the very tangible achievements that effective communication can produce. The fact that many school boards are permitting greater community use of school facilities after regular school hours, for example, is a direct result of increased public involvement in the activities of local school boards.

As a parent, as a taxpayer, as a resident of your community, you have a vital stake in education. No doubt you also have opinions about what's right or wrong with the system. It's one thing to discuss your ideas with friends and neighbours; it's another to become actively involved by communicating with your local member or school board officials. Your first step in becoming involved might be a telephone inquiry or a visit to a board office. Or, better still, attend one of the board meetings; they are all open to the public.

But you may wish to go further – to proceed from communication to action, from talking to *doing*. Every community needs interested, involved people who are willing to work towards the improvement of its educational system. You could be one of them. After all, you don't have to be a Ph.D. to know the merits of a sound education; nor do you have to be an educator to be involved in the education process.

So run through this brochure once more and take another look at the list of duties performed by school boards and the specific examples that follow. If you find such issues challenging and would like to become

actively involved in the work of school boards, get in touch with your school board office or with your school board members. Your next three steps might be to:

- attend school board meetings in your community;
- contact your local home and school association and find out what the major educational issues and concerns are in your area;
- talk with members of your present school board about what it's like to serve on a school board.

If you would like further information on the qualifications required and the prescribed procedure for seeking election as a member, write to the Ministry of Education, Communication Services Branch, Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1L2. Get involved. The future of our entire educational system depends on those who care and those who want to make sure it improves and responds to the times.

Your local school board . . . When you participate in its activities, you won't be bored.

The telephone numbers and mailing addresses of local school boards are listed in the white pages of Ontario telephone directories under the name of the community in which they are located.



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Board of education, *bored* of education . . . Generations of students have indulged in this play on words to poke good-natured fun at the educational system and the school board responsible for making "the rules". But after the initial laughter, the more reflective and inquisitive among us are left to ponder some pretty basic questions about the origins, purposes, and operation of school boards: Why do we need school boards? What functions do they perform? How is the school board formed? How can I benefit from its services? How can I participate in this vital community service?

Why do we need school boards?

Communities across our vast province vary considerably in size, character, and population – and, hence, in needs and interests. To be effective, our educational system must reflect and accommodate these variations. And so, although one of the functions of the Ministry of Education is to define common goals for the education of all students in Ontario, it was realized that these overall objectives had to be adapted to local conditions if the varying educational needs of students in different parts of the province were to be effectively met. It was felt that this continuing process of adaptation, requiring the kind of awareness of local conditions that only first-hand knowledge and frequent contact can give, could not be effectively carried out by a large, central agency. Local school boards geographically close to the people in their area, easily accessible to them, and thus directly acquainted with their particular circumstances, were felt to be in the best position to be sensitive and responsive to local needs.

And so the local school board functions as a kind of link between the Ontario Ministry of Education and the individual school: its prime task is to transmit and interpret the general goals of education formulated by the Ministry to the schools in its jurisdiction and to help the schools adapt these goals to the particular curricular needs of their students.

What do school boards actually DO?

The general goals referred to above are outlined chiefly in the Ministry's curriculum guidelines. The school board's task is to help the schools in its jurisdiction – through the teachers and various education specialists it employs – to develop from the guidelines courses of study that are specifically designed to meet local needs and circumstances. For example, in developing a course of study in geography for Toronto students, teachers would have to keep in mind that these students may require a great deal of instruction in learning about rocks and minerals, whereas children from Sudbury or Timmins, who grow up in an area where rocks and minerals are an integral part of local geography and industry, would require much less. Similarly, children from Ingersoll would benefit from a visit to the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, while children from Ottawa could learn a great deal from seeing how cheese is made in Ingersoll's world-famous factories.

In a wider context, the function of school boards is to assess and meet the educational needs of the people in the communities that they serve. These needs may include language instruction for immigrants, special classes for gifted or handicapped youngsters, kindergarten classes, or summer school courses.

To get even closer to the tangible realities, here are some of the more specific functions of local school boards:

- building and maintaining school facilities;
- hiring principals, teachers, teaching consultants, caretakers, and other staff;
- maintaining and supervising school playgrounds;
- providing school supplies;
- establishing school libraries;
- providing special activities and services;
- establishing summer schools and evening classes;
- providing special education for gifted and handicapped students;
- providing instruction in the French language if a sufficient number of francophone residents so desire.

To give you an idea of how your local school board actually operates, here is a list of just a few of the issues that one board dealt with during a single month: it awarded a contract to an excavating company for work on one school; approved a list of textbooks for use in the elementary schools in its jurisdiction; authorized 160 pupils to participate in an

educational field trip; sold three school buildings that had outlived their usefulness; studied reports for the modernization of several existing school buildings; and approved a system-wide local curriculum guideline for Canadian Studies.

In addition to such diverse tasks and the challenges that arise out of constantly changing needs and circumstances, school boards also have to meet certain "routine" obligations. For instance, each school board in Ontario is required to raise a certain percentage of the money needed to operate the schools within its jurisdiction and to allocate these funds in a way that will provide comprehensive educational opportunities for those who live in the area served by the board. The money is raised through local property taxes collected on the board's behalf by the municipality, with the balance provided in the form of General Legislative Grants distributed by the Ministry of Education. (The provincial funds come from taxes levied on items such as gasoline, alcohol, and tobacco, the Ontario sales tax, and the provincial share of income taxes.)

What is the structure of the school board system?

There are two publicly supported school systems in Ontario – one comprising the non-sectarian public schools open to all children, regardless of religious denomination, and one comprising the Roman Catholic separate schools. The basis for the structure of the two systems is to be found in our constitution, the British North America Act of 1867. The Act designated education as a provincial responsibility and also guaranteed Roman Catholics the right to operate separate schools – a right that they had by legislation at the time of Confederation.

Both types of board operate elementary schools, but only the "public" boards of education are authorized to operate secondary schools. Roman Catholic boards may, however, extend the instruction provided in their elementary schools to include courses commonly studied in Years 1 and 2 of secondary school.

Both types of board are made up of officials elected by the people of the communities they serve and commonly referred to as *school trustees*. The trustees carry out their responsibilities within the framework of the Education Act, 1974, passed by the Ontario Legislature. They employ their own officials, including the